

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 1179

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EC, SHUM
SUBJECT: REACTION TO BUCARAM'S DISQUALIFICATION

REF: QUITO 1099

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: WHILE THE GOE'S DECISION TO EXCLUDE ASSAD BUCARAM FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST HAS BEEN ROUNDLY SCORED IN THE MEDIA AND BY POLITICAL LEADERS OF VIRTUALLY EVERY STRIPE, THERE HAS BEEN VERY LITTLE COMMOTION. SPECULATION IS NOW CENTERING ON WHAT BUCARAM WILL CHOOSE TO DO WITH HIS CONSIDERABLE ELECTORAL CLOUT. END SUMMARY.

2. VIRTUALLY EVERY POLITICAL PARTY LEADER HAS FELT CONSTRAINED TO MAKE A STATEMENT CENSURING THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S ACTION IN DISQUALIFYING BUCARAM. MOST ARE COMING FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE IN THE PAST STATED PRIVATELY HOW MUCH THEY WOULD WELCOME SUCH A STEP. THERE HAVE BEEN TWO NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS. ONE, VICENTE LEVI CASTILLO OF THE VESTPOCKET INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN PARTY WHO APPLAUDED THE DECISION AND CLAIMED ALL THE OTHER POLITICOS WERE SHEDDING CROCODILE
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TEARS. AND THE OTHER, LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FRANCISCO HUERTA, WHO, WHILE CATEGORIZING THE DECISION AS EQUAL IN ITS WRONG-HEADEDNESS TO DOZENS OF OTHER BY THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT, PLACED THE BLAME ON BUCARAM FOR HIS FAILURE TO BE MORE FORTHRIGHT IN HIS OPPOSITION TO THE MILITARY DURING THE LAST FIVE YEARS. HUERTA NOTED THE LACK OF MASS REACTION TO THE EXCLUSION, DESPITE

BUCARAM'S VAUNTED ELECTORAL STRENGTH, AS SIGNIFYING THE CURRENT NUMBNESS OF THE BODY POLITIC, A NUMBNESS THAT BUCARAM HIMSELF CONTRIBUTED TO BY HIS CRAVEN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MILITARY.

3. HUERTA'S STINGING COMMENTARY WAS MADE ONLY AFTER BUCARAM PUBLICLY SPURNED A SUGGESTION THAT THE LIBERALS AND CONCENTRATION OF POPULAR FORCES (CFP) GET TOGETHER AGAIN, PRESUMABLY WITH HUERTA AS THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE AND CFP NUMBER TO JAIME ROLDOS AS THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. BUCARAM SAID THAT HE WOULD NOT GO TO MASS WITH HUERTA, LET ALONE SUPPORT HIS CANDIDACY. CFP HAS PLANS FOR A PUBLIC RALLY IN GUAYAQUIL ON FEBRUARY 24, BOTH TO PROTEST BUCARAM'S DISQUALIFICATION AND TO TEST THE WATERS FOR ALTERNATIVES. THAT ALTERNATIVE IS SUPPOSED TO BE DECIDED UPON AT A PARTY MEETING IN GUAYAQUIL ON THE FOLLOWING DAY. THERE IS A STRONG POSSIBILITY THAT THE 37 YEAR OLD ROLDOS WILL EMERGE AS THE PARTY'S STANDARD BEARER; BUT THERE IS ALSO THE POSSIBILITY THAT BOYCOTT WILL BE CALLED FOR.

4. THE ONLY VIOLENCE THUS FAR --- WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT BE CONNECTED WITH THE DISQUALIFICATIONS OF BUCARAM, AS WELL AS THOSE OF EX-PRESIDENTS VELASCO IBARRA AND AROSEMENA --- WERE THREE BOMBINGS IN GUAYAQUIL. THE TARGETS INCLUDED A CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT AND A NEWS COMMENTATOR
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WHO, ALTHOUGH HE WAS ANTI-BUCARAM, HAD JUST LAMBASTED THE GOVERNMENT FOR BANNING HIM. ONE PERSON DIED IN THE BOMBINGS. THE MAJORITY OF THE BOMBINGS OCCURRING IN ECUADOR SEEM TO BE DONE BY GOE-CONNECTED GOON SQUADS, AND THESE FIT THAT PATTERN WELL. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE GOE MAY BE WORKING UP A PUBLIC ORDER PRETEXT TO BAN THE CFP RALLY ON FEBRUARY 24.

5. IN A FRANK COMMENTARY ON THE MILITARY'S DECISION TO EXCLUDE BUCARAM, DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL (RET) ANDRES ARRATA TOLD CHARGE AND POLCOUNS IN THE ANTEROOM OF PRESIDENT POVEDA'S OFFICE ON FEBRUARY 22 (SEPTELS) THAT THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY TO ASSURE THE CONTINUATION OF RETORNO PROCESS IN VIEW OF THE SHARP MILITARY OBJECTION TO BUCARAM AND THE PRETEXT THAT THIS COULD HAVE SERVED FOR ADVENTURISM IF HE CAME CLOSE TO THE PRESIDENCY. IT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN FAIR, HE SAID, BUT IT SERVED DEMOCRACY AND STABILITY BETTER. ARRATA DENIED VIGOROUSLY THAT BUCARAM'S POLICIES WERE AN ISSUE, ARGUING THAT IT WAS HIS PERSONALITY WHICH HAD BEEN DEBATED. AS AN ILLUSTRATION, THE MILITARY HAD NOTHING AGAINST ROLDOS, WHO, ARRATA SAID, GAVE BUCARAM THE ONLY IDEAS THAT HE HAD.

IF ROLDOS WERE ELECTED PRESIDENT, ARRATA PREDICTED THAT ROLDOS WOULD BE HIS OWN MAN SINCE BUCARAM HAD NOTHING TO CONTRIBUTE BUT VINDICTIVENESS.

6. FEWER TEARS ARE BEING SHED FOR AROSEMENA AND VELASCO IBARRA, WHO HAD ACTUALLY BEEN EXCLUDED BY THE FIRST COMMISSION CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFTERS ANYWAY, BUT HAD BEEN SAVED BY A GRANDFATHER CLAUSE IN THE ORIGINAL TRANSITORY PROVISIONS. IN VIEW OF HIS THIN FOLLOWING, IT IS DOUBTED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT AROSEMENA WOULD HAVE ANNOUNCED HIS CANDIDACY LAST WEEK UNLESS HE WAS ALREADY CERTAIN THAT HE WAS TO BE EXCLUDED. VELASCO WAS NEVER A REAL ALTERNATIVE DESPITE LAST MINUTE URGING BY HIS OLD FOLLOWERS. THE SAME FOLLOWERS, BADLY SPLIT, ARE CURRENTLY CONFIDENTIAL

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MAKING THE BEST DEALS THAT THEY CAN WITH THE OTHER CANDIDATES.

7. COMMENT: THE DECISION OF THE MILITARY TO DISQUALIFY BUCARAM IS A RESULT OF A MYRIAD OF COMPLEX FACTORS, THE LEAST OF WHICH IS PROBABLY THE TYPE OF PROGRESS THAT HE HAS ESPOUSED, AND THE MOST OF WHICH DEAL WITH HIS CONTROVERSIAL PERSONALITY, INCLUDING HIS ALLEGED AUTHORITARIONISM. IN THIS, ARRATA'S COMMENTS SEEM PLAUSIBLE. WE WOULD SHARPLY DIVERGE FROM ANY ANALYSIS WHICH WOULD ATTEMPT TO PORTRAY HIS DISQUALIFICATION AS SIMPLISTICALLY AS AN EXERCISE IN THE RICH DEFENDING THEMSELVES AGAINST THE POOR. AS WE STATED IN REFTTEL, ECUADOREANS WILL HAVE SOME BROAD IDEOLOGICAL AND ATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVES ON JULY 16, INCLUDING ROLDOS. WHILE THE REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER OF THE ELECTIONS IS UNDENIABLY DIMINISHED BY BUCARAM'S ABSENCE, IT HAS HARDLY BEEN OBLITERATED. AND, UNLIKE BUCARAM, IF HE WERE ELECTED, THE NEXT PRESIDENT IS LIKELY TO BE LESS IN THRALL TO THE MILITARY (BECAUSE OF FEAR OF A GOLPE) AND MORE LIKELY TO SERVE HIS FULL TERM. CORR

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